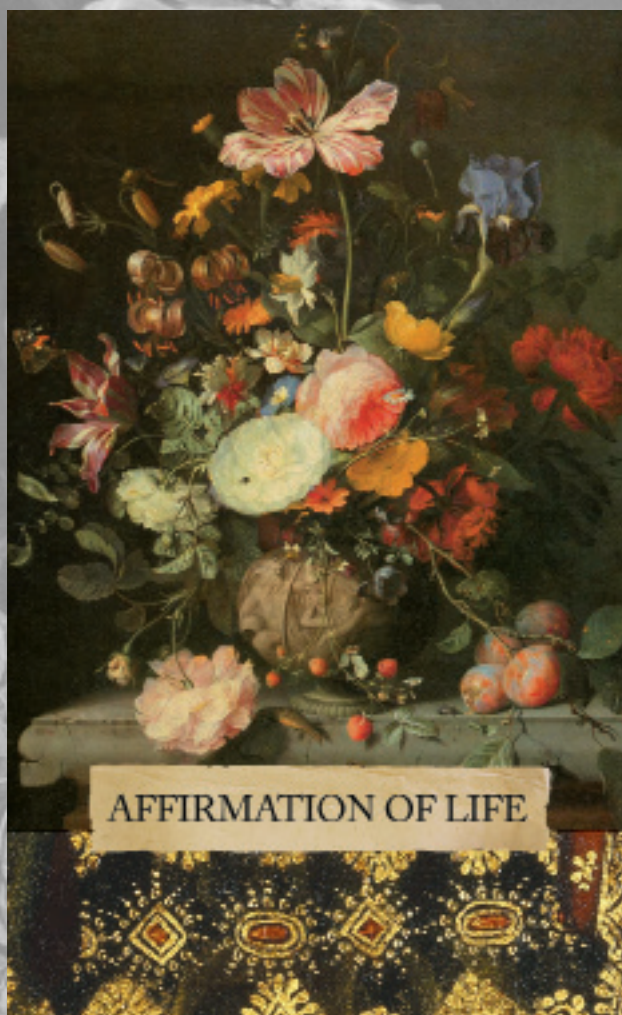


August 2018  
Volume 30  
Number 8



# THE MARK

A Publication of The Church of Conscious Harmony ❖ A Contemplative Christian Community



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# AFFIRMATION OF LIFE

BY PETER HAAS

There have been two moments in my life where I briefly contemplated taking my own life. In both moments, I observed that I was swamped with depressive thoughts and feelings. In both moments, I also remembered that my life was a pure gift, and not mine to take.

The first occasion occurred twenty years ago in late December. It was cold and grey outside. Despite the Christmas season, with all its usual lights and joys, I was feeling exhausted, burnt out, underappreciated and underpaid at work. At home, I felt lonely and unloved, having recently gone through a divorce. I remember driving into my garage at the end of the work week. The electric garage door closed. The car was still running. I sat there and thought: "This is how it could end."

In that moment, as if jolted upward in my seat, an unexpected energy arose from within me – a pure, *physical* affirmation for life,

for *this* life; for *my* life. It was as if my *body* responded to my negative thoughts and emotions with its own logic: "Are you kidding me! No way! You are not your thoughts or feelings! Don't believe them!" The moment that visceral affirmation arose within, I turned the car ignition off and sat there in the silence, aware that I had been spared by an energy I had not conjured and a grace I could not control.

Years passed, and I found myself in an old barn on our Wisconsin farm. It was dusk in mid-summer. I had spent the day in caustic arguments. It was the kind of arguing that felt generated by a negative energy overshadowing every interaction. Though a beautiful pastoral region, the area was also known for wiccan and satanic ritual activity, and I felt its heavy darkness.

As I stood there in the silent barn, my eyes caught the thick tractor chains hanging from the center rafter. In a flash, a wave of

self-loathing crashed over me and seemed to sweep me into a heavy vortex, pulling my solar plexus area into it. The heaviness seemed to pull my attention to the chains, with a vivid thought to wrap my neck with them and hang myself.

Again, as if jolted, this time from above not from within my body, a ray of joy and laughter broke through to me and in that very millisecond I audibly laughed out loud, as if *at* myself, and I heard myself saying out loud "Wouldn't you love that! I am child of God not a slave to you!" By "you," I meant the heavy energy and negative emotions that seemed to be literally hanging over me.

Perhaps you too have had your own encounters with a similar line of thinking and feeling that frequently leads humans down life-denying paths. My wish is that the sharing of my past encounters with this temptation will encourage someone to tell their own present pain or life

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denying ponderings. The moment we share our truth, is often the moment our temptation to despair begins to be transformed. Sharing is often how we begin the journey back to affirming the goodness and rightness of our own, unique life occurring right now – regardless of the way we think our life situation is or isn't going.

Carl Jung, famed psychologist and early teacher to Maurice Nicoll, understood that life's unending urge is "to produce an individual as complete as possible." It seems to me that for many of us, part of the process of becoming as complete as possible is encountering and integrating our own inner shadows and being transformed through our difficulties. Affirming life does not mean ignoring or denying our inner darkness or external difficulties. In fact, it's often in the seeing that both the freeing and completing occurs. It's often in acknowledging our difficulties instead of fighting against them


that a way forward emerges.

Though life (and the spiritual journey) may often feel overwhelming or impossible in any given moment, join with me in wishing to Remember that there is a stronger possibility for you and me than just giving up in defeat. There is the possibility of completion.

Affirming life is also another way of saying *evolving as Christ*. Christ is the way, the truth and the Life. Christ shows us that the way to Life isn't in denying or ignoring the forces of darkness that seemingly wish to undo us. Rather, the way to Life is in moving toward the darkness with a fearless confidence in Abba's healing, liberating light.

Looking back on our life, we

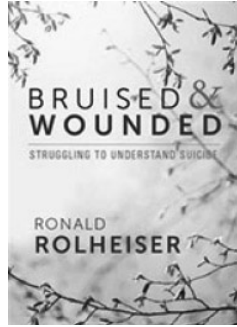
can often see that, like Christ, our crisis moments in life become opportunities for deeper discovery and surrender. Christ shows us the way: *Abba, into thy hands I commit my spirit, my life*. When it does come time for us to breathe our last, may we do so having affirmed life to the fullest. Till then, may the ordinary and extraordinary difficulties and depressions of life lead us to the hidden gift of grace within each passing wave of darkness.

Evolving as Christ means in part that our life difficulties become lances of grace, piercing our hearts open, not to a self-chosen early ending, but to a more complete and humble surrender into the arms of a Community of Prayer and Work that raises us up, again and again. 

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#### UPCOMING SUNDAY TEACHING THEMES

August 5	Be Renewed	Ephesians 4.17, 20-24
August 12	Be Like God	Ephesians 4.30-5.2
August 19	Be Filled	Ephesians 5.15-20
August 26	Be Surrendered	Ephesians 5.2, 21
September 2	Be Doers	James 1.17-18, 21b-22, 27



## BOOK LOOK UNDERSTANDING SUICIDE

The compelling writings of Ronald Rolheiser have accompanied many of us on our spiritual journeys. He is a trusted voice, whose contemplative attunement and pastoral winsomeness seamlessly pair to make one of our culture’s most trusted wisdom teachers.

In his new book, *Bruised and Wounded: Struggling to Understand Suicide*, Rolheiser artfully addresses the often-taboo subject of suicide with gentle compassion and practical guidance.

One of the book’s greatest strengths comes in chapter five, “The Pain of the Ones Left Behind.” Suicide, like other unexpected shocks in life, often leaves survivors feeling a great range of emotions, including anger, guilt and shame.

Rolheiser’s pastoral skill and wisdom come together in this chapter to great effect, and this book makes a useful resource for all our libraries, and a caring gift to those who have lost a loved one to suicide.

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## COMMUNITY READING for August

*Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation  
Changes Your Mind, Brain, and Body*  
by Daniel Goleman & Richard Davidson

This exquisite duet between a down-to-earth science writer and path-breaking neuroscientist reveals how training the mind can transform the brain and our sense of self, inspiring us to create a greater sense of well-being, meaning, and connection in our world.

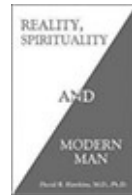
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## CCH BOOKSTORE

### SUGGESTED TITLES FOR AUGUST AFFIRMATION OF LIFE



*In the Flow of Life*  
Grow Onward  
Rather than Grow Older  
by Eric Butterworth



*Reality, Spirituality, & Modern Man*  
by David R. Hawkins



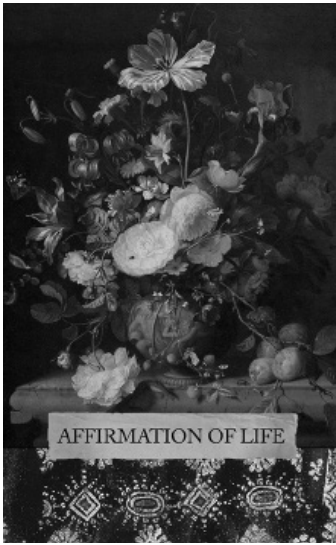
*Night*  
A Human Document  
by Elie Wiesel



*The Mind Illuminated*  
Integrating Buddhist Wisdom  
and Brain Science  
by John Yates, PhD

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BOOKSTORE AND LIBRARY HOURS  
Monday-Friday  
9:00 am-4:00 pm  
Sunday  
One half hour before and after service.



*In Your light, we see light.* Psalm 36:10

## ANNUAL AIM: EVOLVING AS CHRIST

AFFIRMING LIFE BY HAYDEN BROOKS

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Sunday morning, 7:30. I stared out through the large open window.  
And it was once more as if life with all its mysteries was close to me, as if I could touch it. ...  
I felt safe and protected. And I thought, how strange. It is wartime.  
... I know how very nervous people are. I know about the mounting human suffering.  
I know the persecution and oppression and despotism and the impotent fury and the terrible sadism.  
I know it all. And yet – at unguarded moments, when left to myself,  
I suddenly lie against the naked breast of life, and her arms round me are so gentle and so protective  
and my own heartbeat is difficult to describe: so slow and so regular and so soft,  
almost muffled, but so constant, as if it would never stop.  
That is also my attitude to life, and I believe that neither war  
nor any other senseless human atrocity will ever be able to change it.  
Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life and Letters from Westerbork*

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Wow! Where do I even begin when contemplating something as grand as “affirmation of life”? For me, it was a short pilgrimage just this past Memorial Day back to the actual spot where something inexplicable happened. The year was 1972 and I was 13 years old. School had just let out for the summer and my best friend and I

snuck off to go camping in what at the time was private property – the Barton Creek greenbelt. Spring rains had brought flood waters raging down the creek and we pitched camp where a side stream connected with the main body of water. As night fell, the sound of the whitewater nearby was hypnotic and the piercing

pinpoint stars of the Milky Way swept across heaven above on a crystal-clear moonless night.

Rather than getting sleepy, I was energized by the sounds of the natural world surrounding me; and under the cover of darkness, I slipped into the rushing rapids beside our camp. Laying on my back, holding onto the rocks

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over my head and wedging my feet against rocks downstream, I tried not to get swept away. I was enveloped by the sensation of the water flowing over my body and awestruck by the arc of heaven strewn with stars reaching out and touching me from above.

In that moment I was both in the stars and the stars were in me – there was no separation. It was, and is, one wholeness. The dualism of me and the other, of inner and outer, simply broke down. The whole world seemed to be within me. In that moment, I had no comprehension of having such a unitive experience, however when I slipped back into “reality” I felt that something had fundamentally shifted in me. The seed was planted and the taste that there is something much much greater still remains with me.

### **The Lie of Separation**

A similar awareness has occurred on a few other occasions of “not being *in* nature, but rather being *of* nature,” allowing my affirmation of “lowercase” life to become an affirmation of “uppercase” Life. Specifically, the “lie of separation” can be

experienced viscerally, integrated fully and understood truly as an illusion – the root of our suffering and our useless acting out from fear.

Evolutionary psychologists view our singular focus on the input we get from our five sense organs as a primitive survival instinct and how we come to see our own organism’s survival as being dependent upon being separate and apart from others. Unfortunately, driven almost entirely by this primitive survival instinct that at its very core defines me as being “separate” from the other, I lose sight of the true reality that “all is one.”

Where does the “me” begin and end? Where does the “other” begin? At the point where my Self no longer exists is the point where I find God. The door has been opened for me to see the divine in other beings of nature, and reflexively, to see the divine in myself. The ultimate power is Love, and God is Love.

By affirming all Life, I affirm myself because I am part of the wholeness of being. And, if in nothing more than enlightened self-interest, would I so much

as harm nature in that I am simply harming myself? This fundamental shift comes to me by remembering that I am not separate from nature ... that I am part of the sacred balance of nature ... that we and nature are one. As above, so as below. What we do to each other, even to the smallest animal or plant, we do to all creation. We are family.

Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest, was one of the very first scientists to lead the way towards understanding that we humans and the universe are inseparable. His prescient forecast of a collective consciousness that he called the “noosphere” has now been birthed and is a powerful catalyst influencing the evolution of the thin film of life that exists on the surface of the Earth called the biosphere. Amazingly, his prediction predated the invention of the Internet by 60 years! Further, many current scientific discoveries in quantum physics increasingly support our understanding of a holistic existence rather than one that is atomistic or dualistic.

My spiritual journey and transformation of beliefs have been shaped by Teilhard de Chardin’s

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and Ilia Delio's revolutionary and evolutionary thought leadership. They both point out that nature is on a continuous trajectory of transcendence and convergence in Christ. My exposure to their teachings through CCH profoundly strengthens my affirmation of a holistic Life, based on their deeply insightful reflections on the relationship of God, humanity and nature in an ever-evolving cosmos.

Knowing that everything is interconnected allows me to be more aware of the subtle influences from the cosmos. My connection to nature is a manifestation of these subtle influences and the fundamental programs that drive my personality. Rather than believing that my love of nature is somehow of my own egoistic doing, I've come to learn that it is a function of my drive for perfection and where I can readily find some respite from my false-self in the divine perfection and beauty that can only be found in nature. When I can no longer stand the self-criticizing that comes with striving to be a perfectionist, I am called to find solace and peace in nature. This is all so very humbling

and it makes me eternally grateful for CCH where I am within a family of seekers who provide a place to grow in Christ.

My relationship with nature is both a source of great happiness and also deep pain. When I am in nature with all of Life, I can feel the love of God and I am comforted by my own insignificance. In these moments when I consent to God and know that I am held in God's Love, I no longer feel responsible for my perceived inadequacies. Conversely, knowing that we are part of a great being, I feel the pain that we inflict upon ourselves when we harm other living beings. Perhaps the impending global crisis will accelerate our evolution as Christ, in this time that is increasingly referred to as the "Anthropocene."<sup>1</sup>

### **A Way to Love**

I'll never forget the time when Tim shared a little book during the Sunday service that he described as the most accessible book for seekers with a secular background to grasp the ideas of esoteric Christianity. He held up the book and much to my chagrin it was *The*

*Way to Love – the Last Meditations of Anthony de Mello*. The shocking thing was that this was the exact book my mother had given me some 20 years earlier that I had then disdainfully set aside. Little did I know that now, as a result of being part of a body of people seeking to make God the center of their life, this book would reenter my life at a time when I needed its wisdom. I honestly have lost track of the number of times that I have read this wonderful book, but one excerpt that I'll share here is especially appropriate.

*"For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? ~Matthew 16.26*

Recall the kind of feeling you get when someone praises you, when you are approved, accepted, applauded. And contrast that with the kind of feeling that arises within you when you look at the sunset or the sunrise or Nature in general, or read a book or watch a movie you thoroughly enjoy. ... Attempt to understand the true nature of worldly feelings, namely, the feelings of self-promotion, self-glorification. They are not natural, they were invented by

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your society and culture to make you productive and to make you controllable. These feelings do not produce the nourishment and happiness that is produced when one contemplates Nature or enjoys the company of one's friends or one's work."

My own way to love and spirituality was sparked by finding the divine in God's creation of nature. Since this is a fairly common gateway to spirituality, I wanted to share this with my family. One thing that my wife and I did (among many other family nature experiences) for over 10 years in a row was to take our young kids camping to welcome in the New Year. My years of volunteer work have also focused on connecting children and nature in hopes that they too will come to experience joy and wonder in all of God's works.

### **Sacred Nature**


As I sit here, feeling deep gratitude for my brief opportunity to be an integral part of the amazing web of life, I am once again awestruck with wonder as I watch with fascination as

a chameleon transitions from lime green to camouflage brown skittering from a leaf to a branch. How can this be if not a gift of God – one that allows me once again to experience JOY and WONDER in ALL of his creations? As Paul wrote in Romans 1:20:

*For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.*

My recent participation in a CCH work group was such a rare opportunity in our culture today to shake loose the stranglehold I have on the dimension that we call "reality." Our group's study book, *Living Time* by Maurice Nicoll, was an exercise to destabilize my linear/horizontal concept of time and gain a new truer perspective of time as a vertical/fourth dimension. My affirmation of Life (broadly defined) and now my less rigid concept of time, plant the seeds of a higher level of consciousness. Where else can we even imagine being provided these

opportunities other than at CCH?

I ask this question, "Who has experienced the meditative solace of time spent in nature?" As a haven for us in society's accelerating frenzy, nature provides a healing balm that never fails. And as a Centering Prayer practitioner for almost 15 years, some of my most transformative experiences have been on retreat at Cedarbrake doing a walking nature meditation along the Stations of the Cross. Once on retreat, I found myself affirming Life by looking deeply at a fiddlehead fern whose coiled potential mirrored the unfolding of the universe! Perfect in its Beauty. Perfect in its Fibonacci spiral mathematics and, for me, a sacred insight into the Creation and ALL that is. As I take this in, I realize I am connected to the fern and with all of nature, the earth and the cosmos. I am deeply grateful for this doorway to Life, to the universe, and to God. I realize my true nature – my consciousness – is as vast as the universe. 

1 The current geological epoch, viewed as the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on the Earth's climate and the environment.



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## SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP EVOLUTION

Starting Sunday, September 2nd, a few shifts will occur in Sunday morning worship. The wish for these shifts is to support evolution in our worship. Like all things, worship and singing can become mechanical. These slight adjustments aim to support our most conscious expression and experience of worship.

First, the most visible shift will be that all the music leaders will lead from the floor, beside the piano. This will allow for greater ease of communication between the pianist, singers and other musicians. It will also more naturally support our song leaders singing *with* the congregation, rather than *to* the congregation. As a part of this location shift, the piano will be moved to the stair side of the platform floor, allowing for enhanced movement, coordination and communication between the music team and the minister. Plus, this allows the children to use the ramp to access the platform at the end of each worship service. Another shift you will notice is a subtle evolution to our opening songs. Our music team has been working all summer on gently evolving our CCH standards *Come and Pray in Us* and *The Gospel in One Word is Love*. These gentle shifts respect the legacy of CCH worship, and also help us open to future possibilities.

Second, starting September 2nd, all Eucharist bread will be gluten free and the Cup farthest from the Lord's Table on each side, will be non-alcoholic grape juice.



### THE CHURCH of CONSCIOUS HARMONY

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*My Father is still working, and I also am working.* John 5:17

## LIVING THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY IN DAILY LIFE

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**Work Ideas:** We are not our thoughts, feelings or physicality. Awake, we are the observer of our thoughts, feelings and sensations. Identification is the all too human experience of believing our thoughts and feelings; of going along with our body-sensations and appetites. Identification is a result of being asleep. When we get identified with a thought, feeling or sensation it's a wake-up call. Identification can alert us to our urgent need to wake up and Work. Identification is like quicksand to personality. We get stuck in similar patterns of thoughts, feelings and actions. Getting unstuck is the particular grace of the Work, and the merciful skill of the Holy Spirit.

Our thoughts, feelings and behaviors are installed into us by such verifiable programming as our genetics, family of origin, nutrition, culture, religion, geographical environment, historical context, education and life experiences, as well as other unverifiable influences such as cosmic and karmic.

Our thoughts, feelings and behaviors inform, create and shape our personality. A useful definition


of personality is that it is *the emergent sum of how we are thinking, feeling and acting in any given moment*. Similarly, a useful definition of identification is that it is *the consequential sum of how our thinking, feeling and acting in any given moment delays our evolution and keeps us in recurrence*.

As we observe our thoughts, feelings and behavior in any given moment, we begin the process of freedom that can lead to non-identification. As we non-identify, we begin to become aware of a new freedom from our past and present, and especially a freedom from how our past has imprinted our present thinking, feeling and acting. This freedom makes a new future you possible.

**Work Source:** "At this time we all have to think very much about the state of being identified. We all have to struggle against being identified and we all have to resist life. Let me begin by asking this question of each of you: 'Where do you place your feeling of I?'... Now where you place the feeling of 'I' most mechanically is where you will most identify. If you could place the feeling of 'I' fully in *self-remembering*

*[in Christ]*, and all that it means, you would not identify." (Maurice Nicoll, *Commentaries*, Vol 1, 169).

**Practical Application:** This month, practice affirming Life by practicing non-identifying with your personality programs. For example, notice where you or parts of you identify with negative, depressive thoughts and feelings. Resist these thoughts and feelings by replacing them with this specific affirmation: ***Nevertheless, I am a child of God.*** Repeat it as often as you observe the negative thoughts or feelings.

**Supplemental Resources:** The Work finds a way in each generation. Recent teachers such as Byron Katie and Joe Dispenza help many adapt choice Work ideas in very conscious, loving, practical and transformative ways. Consider Katie's primary resource, *Loving What Is: Four Questions that Can Change Your Life* and Joe Dispenza's useful masterpiece, *Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself*. Byron Katie's many free YouTube videos are also useful and convey a sense of her inspiring Being. 

For more experience with these teachings, you are invited to attend the Work of Inner Christianity class held Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at The Church of Conscious Harmony.

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## GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIAN LIFE, GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION

Fr. Thomas Keating, in his seminal work  
*Open Mind, Open Heart,*

lists 42 principles underlying  
the Christian spiritual journey.

Fr. Keating asks that these principles be read according  
to the method of Lectio Divina.

One principle will appear in these pages each month.

### GUIDELINE 7

This constellation of prerational reactions  
is the foundation of the false self.

The false self develops in opposition to the true Self.  
Its center of gravity is itself.

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## MULTI-DAY CENTERING PRAYER RETREATS AT CEDARBRAKE RETREAT AND RENEWAL CENTER

SEP 14-19      6-DAY WELCOMING PRAYER    \$545  
NOV 30-DEC 6    7-DAY ADVENT                                    \$675

“Being on a multi-day silent retreat provides a unique opportunity for intimacy with God. A true safe haven for your spirit where nothing from the outside – no phone calls, emails, letters, media – can hijack your consciousness away from the work God has in store for you. The silence alone works miracles, and when combined with tools like the Welcoming Prayer or Forgiveness Practice, you are empowered to embark on a new level of being in the world with all the world presents. It’s healing and transformative. Just do it!!” ~6-day retreat exit survey

Register today by contacting the church office.

Double room prices. Single rooms,  
if available, are an additional \$10/night on a first-to-register basis.

## AUGUST CALENDAR

Visit [consciousharmony.org](http://consciousharmony.org)  
for a complete listing of events

### SPECIAL EVENTS

Two-Day Commuter Centering Prayer Retreat  
Aug 18 8:30 am-5:00 pm  
Aug 19 8:00 am-5:00 pm  
Cost \$100. Please pre-register in the office.

### MONTHLY

1st Sundays  
Bring non-perishables for Caritas

Community Workday  
Aug 11 9:00 am-noon

### WEEKLY

Sundays  
Lectio Divina 8:00-9:00 am  
Prayer Circle 9:15-9:45 am  
Worship Service 10:00-11:30 am  
Youth Program 10:00-11:30 am  
Fellowship 11:30 am

Wednesdays  
Contemplative Lunch noon-1:00 pm  
Contemplative Communion Service 6:00-7:00 pm  
Meditations on the Tarot 7:15-8:30 pm

Thursdays 7:30-9:00 pm  
Work of Inner Christianity Class

Fridays 7:30-8:45 pm  
Devotional Service

Saturdays  
Scriptorium noon-12:50 pm

### DAILY

Sunday-Saturday 7:00-7:35 am  
Centering Prayer Service in Theosis Chapel

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Recordings of services are available  
through the Bookstore and online at  
[www.consciousharmony.org](http://www.consciousharmony.org)



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## WHAT REALLY COUNTS

The seventy-two disciples, flushed with success, came to the Lord expecting to get a pat on the back, and all He said was,

“Don’t get excited about working miracles.

Anybody with a little psychic power can do that.

What really counts is that you are part of God’s plan.

The thing to rejoice in is that you are chosen to become divine and to join me in raising the consciousness of the world.”

Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*

*The seventy-two returned  
in high spirits.  
‘Master,’ they said, ‘even the demons  
are subject to us  
because we use your name.’  
‘Yes,’ He said to them,  
‘I was watching Satan fall like  
lightning flashes from heaven.  
... Just the same,  
do not rejoice in the fact that  
the spirits are subject to you,  
but rejoice in the fact  
that your names  
are written in heaven.’*

Luke 10:17-18, 20

